

# T14P17 / Contested Knowledge and Expertise in Sustainability Politics

**Topic :** T14 / SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND POLICY

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## GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

In an era of digitalization and climate change, new questions are revolving around the issue of knowledge and expertise in sustainability politics. The emergence of new information and communications technologies (ICTs) and increasing skepticism in (scientific) experts have fundamentally changed the dynamics of knowledge production and circulation in society: Established knowledge and academic research on the environment and climate is questioned beyond the necessary critical debate of scientific evidence ("Fake News", "Fake Science", "The Death of Expertise" Nichols, 2017). At the same time, information based on personal experience and opinion can be widely disseminated through social media and increasingly influences policy processes. What are the consequences of these developments for political decision-making and for the analysis of public policies?

Traditionally, research on the role of knowledge for public policies has focused on tensions between the role of experts and democratic decision-making processes. This panel seeks to provide a platform to challenge, update and adapt well-established theories and approaches focusing on sustainability politics.

The high level of complexity, uncertainty and urgency pertaining to sustainability policy in times of climate change emphasizes the importance of analyzing and rethinking the implications of contested knowledge and expertise in sustainability politics. Political decision-makers depend more than ever on expert knowledge to make informed decisions on critical and interdependent phenomena affecting global sustainable development within the ecological planetary boundaries. While scientists are, however, often contradicting each-other and providing vague information based on their research, other actors are offering alternative explanations and simple solutions for environmental problems, mostly reflecting their subjective understanding of the situation. Who is considered to be an expert on sustainability and how are diverse 'experts' interacting with political decision-makers (e.g. role of professionals vs. laypersons as policy entrepreneurs)? Which knowledge is used and how in sustainability politics (e.g. role of transdisciplinary global networks in sustainability governance)? What are the consequences for sustainability policy, at different levels?

This panel aims to deepen the debate on how contested knowledge and expertise is affecting sustainability politics. It is open to theoretical, empirical and methodological papers in order to advance our understanding on the production, integration and use of scientific evidence versus perceived realities in public policy processes on complex and urgent questions related to sustainability.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Today, established knowledge and academic research on the environment, climate change and sustainability is questioned beyond the necessary critical debate of scientific evidence ("Fake News", "Fake Science", "The Death of Expertise" Nichols, 2017). At the same time, information based on personal experience and opinion can be widely disseminated through social media and it increasingly influences policy processes. What are the consequences of these developments for political decision-making and for the analysis of sustainability policies?

This panel is designed to bring together scholars working on knowledge and the role of experts in the context of new challenges emerging from complex requirements for ecologically sustainable policies in an era of digitalization. It aims to further our understanding on implications of new forms of knowledge production and circulation for sustainability politics against the backdrop of new information and communications technologies (ICTs) and increasing skepticism in (scientific) expertise in society.

We are encouraging theoretical, empirical and methodological papers, including but not limited to the following questions:

1. Who is considered to be an expert on sustainability and how are diverse 'experts' interacting with political

decision-makers (e.g. role of professionals vs. laypersons as policy entrepreneurs)?

2. Which knowledge is used and how in sustainability politics (e.g. academic research vs. transdisciplinary knowledge vs. perceptions vs. big data; role of global multi-stakeholder networks in sustainability governance; role of social media; circulation, multi-level decision-making and accountability)?

3. What are the consequences for sustainability policy? (e.g. policy design and instruments, at different levels of policy-making; integration and translation of scientific knowledge in sustainability policies)